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## THE SCHOOL EXERCISE WRITTEN AT HOME

ANNETTE SAWYER MANNY

The following translation from Paul Keller's story, *The Son of Hagar*, taken from *Der Säemann* of March, 1909, illustrates a type of work which is happily becoming less common in our American schools. Yet it would not be difficult to find in almost any city or town, compositions written, after careful "developing lessons," which show no more initiative than little Peter displays.

Those of us who have attempted to co-operate in the home work are perfectly familiar with the child's attitude. "You were not in school to hear what the teacher said, so how can you know about it?"

Though the story is of course an exaggeration, yet it opens up many lines of thought.

Little Peter had written an exercise upon the subject, "The Joys and Sorrows of Winter." Every boy in the German Empire writes upon this subject in the month of December.

Peter was very proud of his accomplishment and took the composition to his friend, old Gottlieb Peuker, who was sitting smoking in his little room in the house behind the residence of the Hartmanns.

Gottlieb put on his spectacles and examined the composition book. "Pretty good, all but the disgraceful penmanship," he read aloud.

"O, Father Gottlieb, that is the criticism upon the one before, 'Life a Journey.'"

"That is a beautiful theme," said Gottlieb, not without sarcasm. "It is not exactly new. I have heard it sixty times in the annual school sermon. Well, I realize that. Really you have not written well."

"Give me the book, Father Gottlieb; I rather read it aloud to you."

He seated himself on the table, coughed three times, and began: ..

"THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF WINTER.—The winter is an evil time."

"No, no," said Gottlieb, "the harvest is much worse."

"The teacher said so," replied Peter in self-defense, and continued his reading. "The winter is an evil time. It begins the twenty-first of December."

"But why is it so bad in the winter to begin on the twenty-first of December?" inquired Gottlieb.

Peter looked at him in disgust. "Because it begins on the twenty-first of December and it is bad—do let me read! 'The rabbits and deer freeze in the fields and the fox goes forth in search of prey.'"

"Peter," interjected Gottlieb, "have you ever seen a frozen hare? No? I have seen two in my lifetime and many more live ones. And have you ever seen a fox seeking its prey? No? Nor I either. We have no foxes about here."

"Well, there are in other places; let me read. 'The snow is over the top of the house and a poor old woman is looking for wood in the forest.'"

"What kind of a poor old woman?"

"Why, just a poor old woman."

"What if she should get stuck in the snow that is deep as a house? She better not run the risk."

"Father Gottlieb, you are —— but do let me read! 'The poor people are shivering in their rooms and have nothing to eat.'"

"The poor people won't survive long then. It is good that you and I are rich folks. We are not shivering and we have something to eat."

"Gottlieb, if you are so —— I don't wish to read anything more."

"Why, I cannot help it if we are rich. No, no, go on; probably we are coming to the joys of winter now."

"No, there is one more sorrow. 'When icicles hang from the roof they fall upon the heads of careless children.'"

He paused here, expecting another reproof, but Gottlieb nodded assent as much as to say, "Yes, yes, those icicles are a national torment."

"The winter has its joys, too. Children skate."

"Ah! Do you go skating now?"

"No, I have no skates. But the others do. Let me read. 'And many coast merrily on their sleds. The snow is like a shroud,' No, that won't do for a joy. That goes better with a sorrow, I will cross out 'shroud' and write 'bridal robe' above it. It is all the same. 'Good St. Nicholas brings presents and most beautiful of all is the Christmas time. The end.'"

"Yes, yes," said Gottlieb. "Last year you received nothing. But you can write it. It is a beautiful composition. I am going to write one different from that."

"You?" said Peter in astonishment. "How can you write one when you didn't hear what was said in school?"

"I will try it. I will pretend I am little Peter and have a composition to write."

Perhaps half an hour passed; then Gottlieb said, "Now I will read my exercise aloud to you."

"THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF WINTER: A COMPOSITION BY LITTLE PETER.—  
The winter is not very pleasant because I rather go barefoot than to wear

the heavy wooden shoes. With wooden shoes one cannot run well. In winter my father works in the factory but my mother can earn but little, so we have meat only on Sundays, and there is never any sausage. In summer our food is better. Otherwise there is not much suffering in Teichau. Only old Mrs. Pätzolder has a hard time because she is a letter-carrier and Wilke Bauer always gets chilblains. Then I am always sulky because I have neither sled nor skates. If I had not spent the mark and a half that I saved for a scarf, I might have bought some skates and that would have been a joy of winter. Winter has its joys, however. I don't get up until half-past seven. That suits me. And I pelt all the girls and boys with snow. That suits me, too. The grocer is glad because he can sell so much petroleum. My old friend, Gottlieb Peuker, is happy also because he has nothing to do and can smoke his pipe all day long. Everybody is warm, even those in the poorhouse. The dog is happy, lying by the fireside. The field rejoices because it is not being plowed or harrowed or mown. But one cannot see the gladness of the field, he can only think about it. At Christmas time we have no school and that makes us happiest of all.

"Finished," said Gottlieb. "Well, what do you think of my composition?"

Peter stared at him. In his astonishment, he had made no protest. Now he gathered himself together. "You did not sit erect," he said; "Give it to me."

Gottlieb passed him the paper.

As Peter read he uttered cries of amazement, mingled with delight. Seizing the pen he began to mark mistakes. "Thirty-five commas omitted," he said. "Unsatisfactory, careless, stay after school and rewrite. You must be punished."

Gottlieb smiled with some embarrassment. "That is not all," he said; "turn the paper over."

Peter turned the page and read: "It is a very great deal of fun in the winter to have old Gottlieb write a composition and make so many mistakes that one nearly dies of laughing. And then it is a great joy of winter to have Gottlieb buy me a pair of skates for Christmas and make me a little sled."

Peter leaped with joy and, seizing the paper, rushed from the room. Soon he returned and, with an embarrassed expression, peeped in at the door. "Say, Gottlieb, you are not angry because I spoke of the thirty-five mistakes?"

"No, no, little Peter, you didn't count in those on the second page."